DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 032 374 UD 009 122

By-Allen, James E., Jr.

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Pub Date 27 Jun 69

Note-11p.; Speech given to the National Council of Urban Education Associations meeting (Philadelphia, Penn., June 27, 1969)

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.65

Descriptors-City Problems, *Educational Demand, Educational Quality, *Metropolitan Areas, Population Trends, *Speeches, *Urban Education, Urban Population

A speech by the U.S. Commissioner of Education discusses the urgency of finding solutions to problems of urban education. He states that the most important issues to be faced are the metropolitanization of the country and the anticipated high birth rate within the major population centers. Increasing too are the demands for better service from all governmental units. Solutions to these challenges must involve consensus on on procedures and programs for achieving quality urban education. (NH)

ED032374

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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URBAN EDUCATION CRISIS -- THE NEED FOR AGREEMENT ON PROCEDURE*

Remarks by James E. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for Education
and
U.S. Commissioner of Education

It is a privilege for me to be here tonight to join this gathering of educators concerned with one of the major issues of contemporary life: the provision of quality education in today's urban environment.

With such an audience it is certainly not necessary for me to engage in any detailed discussion of the many problems encompassed in this issue. Indeed from my point of view, it would be much more profitable if I could listen to the ideas and experiences you have gained from dealing with these problems on a practical, day-by-day basis.

But whatever the nature of the involvement, the specific position, or the perspective of those concerned with urban education, there is agreement on the reality of the problems and the urgency of prompt action to solve them. Indeed, the agreement on the reality of the problems of urban education itself and of their place in the broader general, overall urban problem goes beyond the people directly involved and is expressed by spokesmen for all the social, political and economic forces of society. There is widespread concurrence too on the urgency of prompt action -- and there is a great deal of action taking place.

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*Before the National Council of Urban Education Associations meeting, Philadelphia Marriott Motor Hotel, Brandywine Ballroom, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Friday, June 27, 1969, 7:00 p.m.

In Flint, Michigan, for example, a program comprising educational, recreational and social components serves the needs of 90,000 children and adults each year. This program has the objective of discovering and demonstrating how a community can use its own resources to solve its own problems, and the program has involved the total community.

In New Haven, one of the model cities, special efforts are being devoted to a bilingual program for Spanish-speaking students with such additional features as adult basic education for the parents of children in the black community as well; community participation, with parents involved in selection of teachers, curriculum content and objectives; and a local advisory committee with parent as well as student membership.

In Detroit, emphasis is being placed on Neighborhood Education Centers.

In Chicago, local college students from the inner city tutor elementary students on a one-to-one basis; a large number of parents serve in advisory capacity with the schools; local business and industry are increasingly involved in vocational curriculum development and cooperative projects; preschool children and parents work together in reading readiness programs.

In New York City, steps have been taken to give citizens more voice in school affairs through decentralization; the "More Effective Schools" program seeks to meet the special needs of the disadvantaged through increased support that makes possible smaller classes, enriched curricular offerings, more individual attention, etc.

Here in Philadelphia, attempts are being made to achieve more meaningful contact between school and community in disadvantaged areas with the service of community coordinators chosen from the community; incentive grants are available to schools and to teachers for new proposals for effecting change.

These are, of course, but a few of the varied and widespread activities going on in cities throughout the Nation. These programs operate under various combinations of local, State and Federal support and make use of a wide range of resources in business and industry, the professions, colleges and universities, citizens groups, social agencies and others.

The action that is going on <u>is</u> making a difference in the quality of urban education -- but the questions must arise of how much of a difference and for how many? When measured against the dimensions of the need, the answers are not comforting.

For the most part the existing programs are efforts to alleviate the most pressing of the concerns, efforts which at best can offer only partial solutions to overwhelmingly complex problems.

Such a conclusion must then lead to the larger question of "Why" -- why, with agreement on the inescapable realities of the problems of urban education and with widespread concurrence on the need for prompt action, have we not yet embarked upon a program involving the kind and degree of support that will provide something more than partial solutions to the many problems involved in the major social issue of providing quality urban education?

There are, of course, many reasons -- the size and complexity of the issue -- and perhaps, of greatest significance, the changing situation within which this issue must be met.

The United States is now in the early stages of its "Metropolitan Era", beginning to experience all the difficulties of adjustment to a changing pattern of population massing and civic expectations. Symptomatic of these difficulties is the perplexity of even defining just what a "metropolitan area" is. The very size of our Nation, the diversity of terrain and location of natural resources, the wide range of regional tastes, reflecting the early settlement patterns of the waves of immigrants to these shores -- all these factors and many more serve to complicate the establishment of a definition.

Not long ago, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, a group established by an Act of Congress, noted that "The metropolitan areas in different parts of the country vary just as distinctively as do the States and the regions, in many respects taking on the social, economic and governmental characteristics of the States in which they are located. And when we look at the individual components comprising a metropolitan area -- the central city on the one hand and its surrounding urban and rural communities (outside central city) -- we find similar variety."

But, however defined, it is the prediction of the Urban Land Institute that by the Year 2000 four major metropolitan complexes -- the Boston to Washington corridor; the Utica, New York to Green Bay, Wisconsin chain; the West Coast corridor from San Francisco to San Diego; the State of Florida, -- plus nineteen smaller centers will hold 77 percent of our population, 241 million people, although these areas represent only 11 percent of the land of the continental United States. The population density ratio between metropolitan America and rural America will be 30 to 1.

It might be thought that the spreading of metropolitan areas would relieve the inner city problems but our main increases in population occur by the birth rate within the major population centers themselves. Normal population increases through high birth rates very often outweigh the migration factor. For example, the 1965 Census revealed that nearly half the urban areas with 250,000 population or more had more people move out than move in; yet

virtually all such areas experienced a net increase in population. Hence, the population growth for the Nation has been and will continue to be a phenomenon occurring predominantly within our central cities and among the resident population there.

This pattern means that our urban educators now attempting to attend to the learning needs of about 75 percent of the United States population will by the Year 2000 have that figure increased to 85 percent.

Such a situation brings to the fore the imperative need for metropolitan organization and reorganization, and for a reversal of the trend toward a proliferation of small units of power within large population centers. The pressures that bear upon the cities and suburbs are similar and unremitting. The demands for service -- better service and more of it -- are hurled at all governmental units. The neat boundaries for cities, towns and school districts within the metropolitan areas are losing their significance in the face of such problems as mass transit, housing, the quality of our air and water, health and medical care, and, of course, education. Obviously, if government is to be efficient and effective, there will have to be consolidation among townships, municipalities, fire districts, health districts, water and conservation districts and other units -- a general tidying up of the confusion of authority, taxing powers, etc.

Along with the need for governmental reorganization, the "Metropolitan Era" of our national development has given emphasis and scope to the demands of the minorities, locked in our central city ghettoes, for a voice, for power, for their rights as citizens.

General aspects of the urban problem such as these, admittedly complex, stubbornly intransigent and beset with difficulties, are a part of the answer to why the hoped for thrust and concentration on urban education has not yet fully developed.

It is, however, my belief, reinforced by the new perspective of my national responsibilities, that there is another reason that may well be even more of a deterrent to transforming agreement on need and urgency into widespread, forceful action.

I refer to the lack of general agreement on how to proceed, on how to go about solving the educational problems of our cities. Before going further, let me make several observations --

First, it is not surprising that there should be such an absence of agreement considering the variety of ways in which urban problems are manifested, reflecting the tremendous variety of our cities;

Second, a search for a measure of "agreement" should not be interpreted as an endorsement for a monolithic or all-the-same approach, nor as a denial of the obvious need for tremendous flexibility;

Third, there should be no illusions as to the difficulties of arriving at such agreement.

But such seemingly limiting conditions cannot alter or postpone the need for a substantial body of agreement. We must arrive at a common understanding on the answers to such questions as: Should the increased Federal funds needed be in bloc grant form, or in categorical aid? Should the funds go through the States or directly to the cities? Should emphasis be placed on the origination of programs at the local level, or should there be demonstration projects developed by the States or the Federal Government as guides for the local districts? What kind of incentives should be provided to encourage and expedite reorganization and change?

At present a bewildering array of programs, being carried out with varying degrees of success, is generating a sense of confusion that in turn is producing a debilitating doubt as to the availability of practical and effective answers to urban education problems.

The negative impact of such doubt is demonstrated in the attitudes of some who, uncommitted to the urgency of the problem, use their doubt as an excuse for withholding support, and of others, who, genuinely concerned and committed, nonetheless fear that constructive progress cannot be achieved without more definite ideas as to procedure.

To dispel such doubt is then the challenge for those directly involved in dealing with urban education problems.

This is a time of opportunity for making advances long sought. There is a nationwide fraternity of concerned urban educators determined to expand and deepen the educational experiences of city children and youth. There is a growing body of citizens aware of the problems both from personal involvement and from a sharpened sense of social responsibility and justice. There are signs of increasing recognition by the States that the special needs of the city have not been adequately provided for. There is a growing national commitment, with both the President and Secretary Finch indicating that the schools in our central cities will receive the special attention of the Federal Government.

As Assistant Secretary for Education and United States Commissioner of Education I have given the highest priority to bringing together our best minds and efforts in a concentration on the problems of urban education.

It is my feeling that our situation can be accurately described in the phrase, "Urban Education -- Today's Problem, Tomorrow's Hope". The very seriousness of the need provides the opportunity for progress and the basis for hope. There is no question that the necessary resources are available for solving the problems of our urban schools. The speedy commitment of adequate amounts of these resources is, however, in my opinion,

greatly dependent on the achievement of a body of agreement on procedure so substantial that it can carry real weight and conviction with those who must make the decisions.

It is my hope that the urban education study now going on within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare will be a step toward arriving at such agreement. It is also my hope that organizations such as yours will recognize the need for agreement and be active in helping to achieve it.

The duty, the obligation to provide good education in our cities is inescapable. Alfred North Whitehead speaks of duty as "arising from our potential control over the course of events". In spite of the magnitude of the problems, we do still possess the potential to control the future course of educational advance. But this potential can be realized only in action.

Let me conclude with a further familiar quotation from Professor Whitehead -- "When one considers in its length and its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage."

I believe that the time has come when we must no longer restrain a "savage rage" at the continuing existence of problems which it is within our power to solve. Translating this "savage rage" into bold and drastic action, today's problems of urban education will be tomorrow's hope, demonstrating that despite the magnitude of the problems, the ideal of equality of educational opportunity can be a reality even for those for whom it has too long been denied by the circumstances in which they live.

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